DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 416 774 HE 031 020

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TITLE	The Freshman Year Initiative: Creating Academic Communities for Students and Faculty at a Commuter College.
INSTITUTION	City Univ. of New York, Flushing, NY. Queens Coll.
SPONS AGENCY	Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE	1996-08-31
NOTE	49p.
CONTRACT	P116B30112
PUB TYPE	Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Academic Advising; College Faculty; *College Freshmen; Higher Education; Organizational Change; Program Development; *Student Development; Teacher Role; Teaching Assistants
IDENTIFIERS	*City University of New York Queens College

ABSTRACT

This final report describes activities and accomplishments of a 3-year program, the Queens College (New York) Freshman Year Initiative (FYI), which emphasizes the importance of the academic community and the role of faculty in integrating freshmen into the college community. The program has become institutionalized and currently involves 600 freshmen (two-thirds of the 1996 entering class), 24 upper-class teaching assistants, and 60 faculty from 22 departments across all divisions of the college. The major accomplishments are seen to be: (1) creation of a freshman class integrated into the academic and cultural life of the college; (2) involvement of full- and part-time faculty in the common enterprise of teaching freshmen; (3) institutional change that integrates all academic programs and support services affecting freshmen; and (4) a changed ethos that makes teaching freshmen a valued endeavor. Evidence of the program's success include establishment of a new office for the on-going program and formation of a new Provost's Steering Committee on Freshmen. Individual sections of the report include an overview; the project's purpose, background and origins, and major activities; and an evaluation. Appendices include an article on the FYI, the FYI schedule, reports from a faculty member and a teaching assistant, an informal evaluation report (Thomas Frosch), and a brochure. (DB)

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Queens College, Freshman Year Initiative
Cover Sheet

The Freshman Year Initiative: Creating Academic Communities for Students and Faculty at a Commuter College.

Grantee Organization:

Queens College, CUNY
Flushing, New York 11367

Grant Number:

P116B30112

Project Dates:

Starting Date: September 1, 1993
Ending Date: August 31, 1996
Number of Months: 36

Project Director:

Judith Summerfield
Department of English
Queens College, CUNY
Flushing, New York 11367
Telephone: 718-997-5567

FIPSE Program Officer: David Johnson

Grant Award:

Year 1	$89,128
Year 2	$106,671
Year 3	$101,457
Total:	$297, 256

HE 031 020

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The Freshman Year Initiative: Creating Academic Communities for Students and Faculty at a Commuter College

Queens College, CUNY
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Project Director: Judith Summerfield
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A. Project Overview

At the end of three years of FIPSE Funding, the Queens College Freshman Year Initiative (FYI) has been "institutionalized." The program has a new office, a staff, a college budget--and is hailed as the college's flagship program. But the word, *institutionalized*, denies the character of FYI. The program seeks to humanize the *system*, changing the ways in which we bring students into the university. Although the project has evolved organically, we have fulfilled the promise of "creating a community" for newly entering college freshmen. We hadn't anticipated, though, either the fiscal crises the university would suffer during these three years, or the far reaching effects the project would have for both faculty and the college itself.

With seed money provided by the City University of New York, in September 1992, the project began as a small pilot with 34 students and five faculty. Four years later, with FIPSE support, two-thirds of the 1996 entering class is enrolled in "FYI courses." Nearly 600 freshmen, two dozen upper-class teaching assistants, and 60 faculty from 22 departments across all divisions of the College are involved in the program.

In 1996, FYI received a Theodore M. Hesburgh Certificate of Excellence for "faculty development programs that focus on undergraduate teaching." The award pamphlet represents the character of the program:

> What distinguishes FYI is the recognition and respect for faculty as the essential agents of change. Many freshman programs emphasize advising, counseling, and support services, but these do little if the academic foundation is not solid. FYI is predicated on the belief that change must come first *out of the academic*: what is being taught in the classroom. At Queens College, the Freshman Year Initiative is nothing less than a shoring up of the intellectual foundation of the institution.

The accomplishments of FYI can be represented then in these four ways :

1. Creating a Freshman Class: Finding the best ways to invite new freshmen into the academic and cultural life of the college.
2. Engaging full- and part-time faculty in the common enterprise of teaching freshmen.
3. Effecting institutional change through the integration of all academic programs and support services that affect freshmen..
4. Changing the ethos of the college, so that teaching freshmen becomes a valued endeavor.

Queens College, Freshman Year Initiative
Summary Paragraph

Judith Summerfield
Department of English
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4. Changing the ethos of the college, so that teaching freshmen becomes a valued endeavor.

B. Purpose

The problem we addressed in the preliminary proposal to FIPSE, September 1993, was the elusive notion of "community." We promised to create a "sense of community for freshmen at a commuter college," easing their transition from high school to college by establishing freshman learning communities of three linked courses. Students would select additional courses to complete full-time programs.

As the program developed over the past four years, so has our understanding of the complexity, multi-dimensionality, and urgency of the problems. We began with freshmen--we end now with questions about the place of public higher education in the global, technological age at the *fin-de-siecle*; about the needs for transitions between the high schools and the university; and between the first two years of general education and the majors. We find ourselves in the middle of tensions about general education, the liberal arts, and pre-professional training. In creating a new institutional space for freshmen *cohorts*, we find that we need to know more about this generation of students, how they see their worlds, and how we, as faculty, need to bridge the generational and cultural gaps. We need to address questions about the infrastructure of the college, to bring together all offices that affect the lives of freshmen. We need to know about the yields of linguistic and cultural diversity in a college set in the megatropolis of New York, with its new flow of new immigrants.

c. Background and Origins

The Freshman Year Initiative needs to be seen within a larger social context of financial and ideological crises within the City University of New York. The name itself is derived from a CUNY-wide initiative to address problems of retention in the freshman year. The Queens Model, as it has come to be known within CUNY, has succeeded within the category of a CUNY initiative on retention in the freshman year. The program originated in a faculty-administration collaboration between Judith Summerfield, Professor of English, and Elizabeth Boylan, Provost. The idea was to create the best program for freshmen that we could.

D. Project Descriptions

The "elegant and simple" structure of FYI is the academic community of two or three linked courses, with four or five faculty working together on the common enterprise of teaching freshmen. Academic communities are built on mutual respect for faculty, as the essential agents of change. Changes in curriculum and pedagogy come out of faculty working together.

The changes to the institution include:
1) creating a freshman "class" at a commuter college;
2) creating intellectual communities for faculty;
3) creating the role of the teaching assistant;
4) involving the administration in conversations about what faculty need to find the best ways to teach freshmen.

Changes in the institutional infrastructure have taken place within existing structures, with respect for local strengths, local history, and local culture.

E. Evaluation

1. The best evidence for the success of FYI is that the college has created a new office for The Freshman Year Initiative, with staff, office space, and a college budget.

2. Changes have been effected out of shifts in perspectives among faculty, administrators, staff, and student teaching assistants.

3. Faculty are seen as the essential agents of change.

4. Significant changes are taking place within the institution through:

a) The formation of a new Provost's Steering Committee on Freshman

b)Integration of all academic programs and support services related to freshmen

c) Accepting responsibility for collecting data on retention, GPA's, and graduation

F. Summary and Conclusions

1. To focus on the teaching of freshmen is **to open the door to the workings of the entire system,** to what comes before in the high schools, to the freshman year itself, to undergraduate education, to support services, and to the cultural life of the college. To begin by considering freshmen is to end by talking about the institution.

2. The **Provost's Steering Committee on Freshman**, in attempting to integrate both academic and support services which affect all freshmen, is one of the most significant outcomes of the Freshman Year Initiative.

3. FYI creates the possibility for **a freshman "class"** at the college, and the possibility, through academic communities, of a **coherent first year.** FYI students find their identity in college through FYI. They circle back into the program as teaching assistants and want to stay connected to the growing FYI community.

4. **Full and part-time faculty engaged in the common enterprise of teaching freshmen become agents of change**, in the classroom, in the disciplines, and in the college itself. Through reflective practice, faculty are driving paths through their curricula and through pedagogy. They are looking critically at their own unexamined assumptions.

5. The structure of the academic community is **elegant and simple**, says Patricia Bridges, Chair of Anthropology. In the classroom and in the communities is where the important work takes place--the function of the FYI office is to facilitate the workings of the individual communities.

6. The program gains its strength from its **grassrootedness--**faculty working together in teaching freshmen, observing, experimenting, talking to each other, comparing notes, making changes, and including the administration in their **conversations**. The administration, in turn, has created a crucial protected space in which faculty can do their work. The key throughout is **mutual respect** among all participants: students, faculty, staff, administrators.

6. Changes, we believe, will also come out of funneling crucial questions about curriculum and pedagogy through the **various intellectual perspectives** that constitute the academy: we stand to gain when biologists, anthropologists, philosophers, literary critics, and the like work together **under the new category of teaching freshmen**.

Queens College Freshman Year Initiative
Final Report

A. Project Overview

> *Twenty years from now our students won't necessarily remember what we taught them, but they'll surely remember how we treated them.*
> *Kevin Birth, Anthropology, FYI Faculty Meeting*

> *As an individual going to college, I believe certain things should be expected of both the teacher and the student. Both should give the proper respect due to the other.*
> *Olivia Ben-zur, FYI student*

At the end of three years of FIPSE Funding, the Queens College Freshman Year Initiative (FYI) has been "institutionalized." The program has a new office, a staff, a college budget--and is hailed as the college's flagship program. But the word, *institutionalized*, denies the character of FYI. The program seeks to humanize the *system*, changing the ways in which we bring students into the university. Although the project has evolved organically, we have fulfilled the promise of "creating a community" for newly entering college freshmen. We hadn't anticipated either the fiscal crises the university would suffer during these three years, or the far reaching effects the project would have for both faculty and the college itself.

With seed money provided by the City University of New York, in September 1992, the project began as a small pilot with 34 students and five faculty. Four years later, with FIPSE support, two-thirds of the 1996 entering class is enrolled in "FYI courses." Nearly 600 freshmen, two dozen upper-class teaching assistants, and 60 faculty from 22 departments across all divisions of the College are involved in the program.

In 1996, FYI received a Theodore M. Hesburgh Certificate of Excellence for "faculty development programs that focus on undergraduate teaching." The award pamphlet represents the character of the program:

> What distinguishes FYI is the recognition and respect for faculty as the essential agents of change. Many freshman programs emphasize advising, counseling, and support services, but these do little if the academic foundation is not solid. FYI is predicated on the belief that change must come first *out of the academic*: what is being taught in the classroom. At Queens College, the Freshman Year Initiative is nothing less than a shoring up of the intellectual foundation of the institution.

FYIer Olivia Ben-zur insists that "the proper respect," among faculty and students, lays the groundwork both for good teaching and good learning.

Tristan Davies, editor from Johns Hopkins University Press, assigned to write an article on FYI for the college's alumni magazine (in press), suggests that FYI is about "family," students finding a "certain unity" in their freshman year, that gives them a sense of belonging and identity. (See Appendix, 1)

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The accomplishments of FYI can be represented then in these four ways :

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2. Engaging full- and part-time faculty in the common enterprise of teaching freshmen.

3. Effecting institutional change through the integration of all academic programs and support services that affect freshmen..

4. Changing the ethos of the college, so that teaching freshmen becomes a valued endeavor.

B. Purpose: Creating Academic Communities

The problem we addressed in the preliminary proposal to FIPSE, September 1993, was the elusive notion of "community." We promised to create a "sense of community for freshmen at a commuter college," easing their transition from high school to college by establishing freshman learning communities of three linked courses. Students would select additional courses to complete full-time programs.

The plan called for weekly meetings for faculty, and extra hours in both English and Math courses for meetings with undergraduate teaching assistants. Weekly seminars would be held for undergraduate teaching assistants. Writing would be encouraged in all disciplines. Interdisciplinary faculty communication would lead, we hoped, "to interdisciplinary thought on the part of both faculty and students." Monthly colloquia for students and faculty would introduce students to the intellectual and cultural worlds of the academy.

As the program developed over the past four years, so has our understanding of the complexity, multi-dimensionality, and urgency of the problems. We began with freshmen--we end now with questions about the place of public higher education in the global, technological age at the *fin-de-siecle*; about the needs for transitions between the high schools and the university; and between the first two years of general education and the majors. We find ourselves in the middle of tensions about general education, the liberal arts, and pre-professional training. In creating a new institutional space for freshmen *cohorts*, we find that we need to know more about this generation of students, how they see their worlds, and how we, as faculty, need to bridge the generational and cultural gaps. We need to address questions about the infrastructure of the college, to bring together all offices that affect the lives of freshmen. We need to know about the yields of linguistic and cultural diversity in a college set in the megatropolis of New York, with its new flow of new immigrants.

We have the same sense, then, that the literary critic Barbara Herrnstein Smith had when she set about to study the way poems end. She says in her introduction to Poetic Closure, that she thought she was landing on an island, but found, instead, a continent. We had no idea that to begin with freshmen was also to open the door to the whole of the university.

What can we say to others "trying to replicate the model"? The model is home-grown. It comes out of local culture, local history, and local problems. What can be transported, however, is this: that faculty working together on a common enterprise can become agents of change, and that administrators can create a protected, crucial space for faculty to discover the kinds of the work that they need to do to teach a new generation of students.

C. Background and Origins:

Queens College

Queens College is one of the ten senior colleges in The City University of New York, the third largest public university in the United States. Of the 200,000 students enrolled in the CUNY system, Queens College's current population is approximately 18,000 baccalaureate and master's students. At last count, our students derive from 120 different countries and speak 67 different native languages. Senior literature courses in Greek, Hebrew, Korean, Chinese, and Russian are filled each semester with native speakers of those languages. From the 1990 census, we know that Queens County is the most ethnically diverse county in the country, and from Queens College Professor Linda Edward's 1995 study, *Immigration/Migration and the CUNY Student of the Future*, we know that Queens College already reflects this diversity.

Over half the new students each year are transfer students, predominately from the two borough community colleges. Queens has 56 undergraduate major programs and 49 graduate programs. The general education curriculum includes English composition, foreign language, physical education and Liberal Arts and Science Area Requirements (LASAR).

Queens faculty comprises approximately 600 full timers and 500 part timers.

The 1995 Middle States Accreditation Self Study Report recognizes that in a large urban public institution such as ours, where both students and faculty commute, the quality of campus life is often lacking. Students come out of their neighborhoods and return to them. Work often comes first, and then school. Faculty have got used to doing their scholarly work at home and coming to the campus only to teach. The campus itself does not accommodate faculty or students into genial communal spaces. Add to this, persistent fiscal crises and a public university under fire: in May 1995 and 1996, CUNY declared "financial exigency," providing the legal means for restructuring the entire university, for early retirement incentives, the elimination of academic departments and programs, and the firing of full-time, tenured faculty and staff. With fiscal crises eating away at office and classroom supply budgets, even chalk and erasers are in short supply.

The full-time faculty is 1/3 smaller in 1996 than it was a decade ago. Although the financial exigency of Spring 1995 has been repealed by the courts, there is a real sense of despair. And while various committees are being formed to consider how to restructure the college, to prepare for further state

cuts by getting the academic and fiscal house in order, there are other groups at work resisting change, at all costs.

Politically, this is a dangerous, angry time--of polarization, distrust, increased tensions between the central university (CUNY) and the colleges, and between college administration and faculty. Local control is threatened, as the central administration determines what the system's priorities need to be. The Chancellor of the University increasingly decides how local dollars are to be spent, allocating moneys through what are called "initiatives."

The Freshman Year Initiative

The Freshman Year Initiative needs to be seen within this larger context. The name itself is derived from a CUNY-wide initiative to address problems of retention in the freshman year. The idea for The Freshman Year Initiative grew out of a Ford Foundation Grant that Judith Summerfield, Professor of English, had received in 1992, to consider the challenges of multiculturalism, diversity, and the canon of the traditional English department. Faculty, students, and administrators met, informally, to discuss the issues. The Provost, Elizabeth Boylan, subsequently invited Summerfield "to dream up the best possible program for freshmen that we can." The two collaborated on writing the CUNY proposal in the summer of 1992. (Other campuses within CUNY set up "freshman year initiatives," using various models for learning communities. Some, such as the one at Medger Evers College, were counseling-based; others, such as the one at Hunter College, is block-scheduling, where students are assigned common schedules.)

The Queens Model, as it has come to be known within CUNY, has succeeded, then, within the category of a CUNY initiative. The program has gained local and national attention through FIPSE support, the Hesburgh Award, local news coverage in the college and in the community. It is seen by the current administration as essential to the college. In a climate, however, where the lines between faculty and administration are ideologically drawn, a program such as FYI--although originated and run by faculty--is seen, by some, as tainted, precisely because the "initiative" was set by the central administration.

Our success is fragile and hard-won. But any change, we realize, even in the best of times, will be met in some quarters by resistance.

D. Project Description: Features, Assumptions, Planning Strategies:

1. Structure

Our initial population was the "regular" college student, who had passed the CUNY Writing Assessment Test. At Queens, approximately 60% of an entering freshman class places into Freshman Composition (English 110). Of the remaining 40%, one-third is placed into English 95, the developmental course in the English Department. One-third places into College English as a Second Language (CESL); and one-third into the SEEK program, for students having inadequate high school preparation (averages below 80 and low levels of family income). The project developed, as follows:

September 1992: FYI was created as a CUNY pilot project of one academic community of three linked courses for 32 freshmen, five faculty, and six upper-class teaching assistants.

September 1993: With FIPSE support, FYI expanded to three communities (135) students.

September 1994, the program was tripled to include nine communities (360 students, 47 faculty, and 18 teaching assistants).

September 1995: Replication of 1994

September 1996: With the institutionalization of FYI, we are experimenting with the following models, in order to reach the entire freshman class:

FYI III: three linked courses, with Freshman Composition as the course in common. (nine communities, 360 students, 41 faculty, 15-18 teaching assistants; see FYI III schedule in Appendix 2, 3)

FYI II: two linked courses, without Freshman Composition. (eight pairs, 200 students, 12 faculty)

FYI 95: English 95 paired with a General Education course. (20 students, two faculty)

FYI/CESL (a new FIPSE-supported project for integrating CESL students and their faculty into the mainstream academic community.) (80 students, six faculty)

(FYI works with the SEEK program on the new Provost's Steering Committee on Freshmen; see below.)

2. Creating a Freshman "Class":

I think that we help freshmen absorb the shock of the transition from high school to college.

Debbie Seymour, English

The best part of FYI? I always had someone to study with, and I always had a ride home.

April Mancini, ,FYIer

Until we began the Freshman Year Initiative, there was literally no freshman "class" at Queens College--freshman dissolved, as a group into the college. Worse, there was no coherence to the freshman year.

Queens College, like most colleges and universities, has a "shopping list approach" to General Education requirements. In the freshmen year, the only requirements are "Basics Skills Courses" in English and Mathematics, where placement is determined by CUNY assessment tests. At a one-day advising procedure in the summer, new students in groups of 100 are simultaneously introduced to the college and

register for courses, with the help of a general faculty advisor. Without FYI, Freshmen enter the college with little possibility for identity as a group. Introductory classes are generally large lectures, often taught by junior faculty or part-timers, who have little connection to the college. Little data have been collected on what happens to freshmen, or on who actually transfers from and into the college. No formal faculty advising is offered until the student declares a major.

FYI is changing the ways we bring students into the university--by creating the possibility for a freshman class--and a freshman culture. Our goal is to provide students with a coherent first year, through a first semester in an academic community, where classes are taught by faculty (mostly full timers) who have chosen to teach in the program. Courses are either "dedicated" freshman courses, or "reserved seats" in an introductory course. We are working to insure that freshmen gain entry to the appropriate level basic skills courses, required in the first year, but often not available because of budgetary constraints. FYI is opening the seams of freshman life at the college, and discovering ways to provide, what FYI faculty Tom Frosch calls, "the benefits of the small liberal arts college."

Through traveling together to three courses, students find their way academically, form study groups with their peers, and make friends. For the student in trouble in the first year, the community of peers, teaching-assistant, and faculty provides support. Data need to be gathered on how these interventions work. Now, they work informally through the connections of faculty working together, comparing notes, observing patterns of freshmen adjusting into a new culture.

The academic community--particularly through the upper-class teaching assistant, who serves as a mediator between freshmen and the college--also provides access to the network of support services within the college that all freshmen need: advising, counseling for majors and careers, financial aid, as well as to the cultural life of the college. FYI alumni are now forming a group of their own, circling back into the program as upperclassmen--who have *made it*--to extend a hand and their experience to new freshmen.

FYI is a one-semester program. Advising and pre-registration into the second semester are offered for all FYI students. (At the time of this writing, November 1996, we have just completed two weeks of advising and pre-registering 500 freshmen for the spring semester.)

3. Creating a Faculty Community

I haven't felt such involvement in my teaching for a long time. It feels as if I've let the air in.
Royal Brown, Film Studies

We've created the only space on campus where we can actually talk about teaching.
Fred Purnell, Philosophy

Until the Freshman Year Initiative, full-time faculty had virtually no sense of who the freshmen are, because freshmen, as a group, aren't distinguishable in large introductory courses--or they are taught in small sections, usually of Freshman Composition, by part-time faculty, who are themselves disenfranchised.

At the commuter school such as Queens, both students and faculty are commuters. College life for some faculty barely exists outside classroom contact hours. Scholarly work is done elsewhere. Office space is often not conducive to holding student conferences--there are few spaces where faculty meet to chat or linger over a cup of tea. Faculty culture is a minimum. As commuters, faculty travel to the college from neighborhoods close by in Queens, Manhattan, New Jersey. Many, though, travel long distances from Upstate New York, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Vermont, Maine, Washington, DC

While the primary goal of the project is to find the best ways to bring freshmen into the academy, the most significant unintended outcome has been the creation of a faculty community. The program engages full-and part-time faculty in the **common enterprise of teaching freshmen**. FYI faculty, as a group, are impressive: Of the 40 faculty working in FYI III in 1996, 29 are full-timers, 11 part-timers, 14 are full professors, two chairs of their departments, 8 untenured new faculty (several are "diversity hires"); six are Graduate Assistants working on their doctorates; 13 are women.

We are often asked how faculty and courses come to be included in the program. The answer: we build the program out of our **local strengths**, out of faculty who hear about the program and want to volunteer, out of door-to-door salesmanship, suggestions from other faculty, administrators, staff, and students. We haven't funds to establish freshmen seminars or new courses; we work, therefore, **within institutional constraints**. The program is a grass-roots effort. It has been trial and error. Some courses work better than others. Some faculty work better than others. Some faculty, no matter how willing, find that "**freshman shock**," as we have come to call it, cannot be overcome and that they are happier teaching upperclassmen.

The communities include what may appear to be strange bed-fellows: Calculus, Introduction to Music, and Freshman Composition. But faculty working together devise their own ways of linking courses in their communities. That, perhaps, has come to be the distinguishing feature of the academic work--**interdisciplinary work develops, first, out of mutual respect, and, if it comes, it develops out of the disciplines**. Each community finds its own ways of working together. Some communities of faculty have stayed together over the past three years.

Each community has a "community leader," who calls group meetings and plans for group activities with these common denominators: Communities meet regularly throughout the Fall semester and have planning meetings in the Spring and Summer; exchange syllabi, textbooks, class materials; coordinate calendars of quizzes, exams, papers; sit in on each other's courses; chart the progress of individual students; identify students who are having problems; use undergraduate teaching assistants in classes; encourage study groups; plan interdisciplinary projects; experiment with new technologies; get together for cultural events on campus; introduce students to the cultural life of New York City, its museums, theaters, libraries, poetry readings, exhibits; publish students' work; advise students for their second semester; advise students on majors, career choices.

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A faculty community has now grown up around FYI, with faculty planning together in November for the next fall semester, when, out of trial and error, they say, they will do it "differently" next time around.

4. Teaching Assistants

The "teaching assistant is" a junior or senior, usually an English major, who assists in most Freshman Composition courses. (The math instructors, unfortunately, have dropped the extra hour in math classes and the support of teaching assistants, although math faculty are now revisiting the possible benefits of both. Teaching assistants are also working in geology, philosophy, and the new CESL project, so there has been some headway in experimenting with TA's in other disciplines.) TA's in English attend class meetings, meet individually with students, and often in writing groups. The TA is a central figure in the project, often a mediating figure between student and faculty, and the one who often "hooks" students into cultural events on campus and helps the new student absorb the shock of the first semester. TA's in English are enrolled in a 4 credit English elective, English 398, a course in the theory and practice of composition.

E. Evaluation/Project Results

1. A Room With a View:

The best evidence for the success of the Freshman Year Initiative is that--to borrow E.M. Forster's title for his 1910 novel--we have a **room with a view**. In May, 1996, the college established an office of the Freshman Year Initiative. It is a large spacious room, 30 x 60, in the basement of a recently renovated building. There are three windows fitted at the top of the ten foot high ceiling, so that while we can't quite look out at the campus, the room benefits from natural light. The room is like a studio apartment, all activities taking place in this one space--with two new desks, chairs, several file cabinets, computers, a printer, a fax machine, and a little supply room off the main room, with plenty of paper and file folders. There is a table along one wall, where faculty and students often meet. The phones ring constantly. We have a full-time administrative assistant, Maria Sztendera, and a part-time assistant, Samantha Kinsley, for the new CESL/FYI project. Both were TA's in the program before they were graduated from the College. Two new TA's, Claire Mangan and Tammy Rothman, still undergraduates, are working a few hours a week.

The Director of the Program, Judith Summerfield, a Professor of English, is now, also, a member of the Provost's Staff. Co-director, Martin Braun, is a Professor of Mathematics.

The program has become part of the institution. But, as we note above, the word perhaps should be *deinstitutionalize*, or perhaps *demarginalize, or demythologize*. Our

room" gives us various views: the perspectives of faculty from a range of disciplines; teaching assistants,

who have been through the system; new freshmen entering the academy; administrators, trying too steer the college through difficult times; staff from all offices serving freshmen.

2. *Fresh(man) Views*

We are learning to respect this current generation of freshmen, as individuals, and as a group. We have a better sense of what it means to be a freshman in 1996, about the tensions between work and school; about conflicts between home and school, where many of our students come out of cultures that are in opposition to the school culture; where most are first-generation college students; where many are so protected in their religious or ethnic enclaves that they have not yet crossed the bridges into Manhattan.

We learn, for example, that the *New York Times*, which many English faculty are having their students read in Freshman Composition, is not the newspaper that their parents or they typically read. *The New York Times* is not a working class newspaper; it is as one FYIer, William Mack, says, for the suburbanites riding into New York on the Long Island Railroad. "We're not New Yorkers," they say, "we live in Queens." And yet New York for many of them, is like the green light at the end of Daisy's pier in Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*. *Gatsby* is a fitting image here: our students live outside the glitter and glamour of "New York"; the New York of the *New York Times*, with its advertisements for Tiffany's, Saks Fifth Avenue, Bloomingdales, the opera, the theater, and museums stands in stark contrast to their lives. Queens College is not Columbia, Barnard, or NYU. But many of them would like to have the money to afford to shop in Tiffany's if they *want* to--or to afford to go away to school.

At the FIPSE Directors' Meeting, October 1996, in a plenary session on national trends in higher education, Elaine El-Khawas, of the American Council on Education, quoted Alexander Astin's national survey of college freshmen: *Students today are more interested in seeing college as a means to the end of 'getting a job' than they were thirty years ago. Thirty years ago, students were more interested in learning for the sake of learning.* El-Khawas says that this *trend is disheartening.* Astin's 1995 statistics are also used in a recent *Daily News* article, "Generation X a Zero on Campus." Syndicated columnist John Leo claims that "Incoming college students 'are increasingly disengaged from the academic experience:

> Only 35% of students said they spent six or more hours a week studying or doing homework during senior year in high school, down from 43.7% in 1987. And the 1995 survey shows the highest percentage ever of students reporting being frequently bored in class, 33.9%.
> (September 30, 1996, 29.)

"Disengaged rudeness," is the term that Leo uses from Peter Sacks, in his *Generation X Goes to College*. Students, according to Sacks, "chat loudly, sleep, talk on cell phones. . . and even watch television during class, paying attention only when something amusing or entertaining occurred." Students are used to their hands being held, to watered-down standards, and to becoming "increasingly disengaged from anything resembling an intellectual life."

This is not our sense of FYIers. Out of our work, we're coming to ask different questions, and to listen to their voices, as they represent their generation. William James' in his well-known essay, "On a Certain Blindness in Human Beings," says that the "spectator can know nothing of the truth." As FYI faculty, we find the surveys wanting. There need to be better ways of finding out who are students are, intellectually, **so that we can help to make better intellectual connections with them**. We also need to help them make connections between college and what they might do after they graduate. It is easy to talk about short attention spans and the deleterious effects of television. We need to do longitudinal studies, and collect qualitative about students' learning, as well as quantitative data about retention, etc.

In an informal study this semester, students were asked to respond to Leo's article about Generation X: our findings suggest that we need to take a very different view of Generation X. When asked, "Why do you think you're in college," students offered the following kinds of response, all of which suggest that they are juggling questions about why they are in college and about the links that must be made between college, work, and, as they say, "the real world":

1. To find out what I want to do and further my education in the process.

2. I'm in college to learn about the real world and to prepare myself, so that I can go into the real world with experience and knowledge.

3. I'm in college because I have to be. I'm choiceless in the matter. One needs a college degree.

4. I'm in college to enhance my knowledge and to figure out what direction I want to head in the future.

5. To learn about the possibilities in life. (Ipsa scientia potestas est.)

Faculty have come to see the freshman as "fresh," as open to learning. David Weiman suggests that students in Ivy League schools where he has taught have the "street smarts" necessary to succeed in college:

> Even if it's not good, they hand something in. But our students don't have that kind of daring. If they're not sure, they won't hand it in. Yale students come to office hours. Queens students are wary of stepping into a professor's office. You have to reach out to them.

Working with freshmen makes our jobs as faculty clearer--as Royal Brown puts it, "I've let the air in."

3. *Views From the Disciplines: How to Think About Weird Things*

Their responsiveness has driven a path through my curriculum
Edward Smaldone, Music

My parents' unexamined assumptions are forcing me to leave home.
Alex Smith

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Faculty as Agents of Change

As mentioned above, the Hesburgh award distinguishes the Freshman Year Initiative as an innovative faculty development program. What characterizes FYI is the recognition and **respect for faculty as the essential agents of change**. Many freshmen programs establish seminars to introduce students to college life, teach them survival skills in note taking, study habits, computer-assisted instruction. Residential colleges build learning communities around dormitory life. Indeed, the "learning community" concept has become a nationwide trend with the most established centers at the residential Evergreen State College and at the University of South Carolina. (See *Learning Communities Directory*, First Edition, February 1996. See also materials produced by The National Resource Center for The Freshman Year Experience, U. of South Carolina.)

But we are a commuter school. Our program is built on the belief that change must come first out of the academic: what is being taught in the classroom. Our innovations must come out of existing structures. At Queens, both full and part-time faculty are engaged in the common enterprise of teaching freshmen. That mix is crucial. Just as our students represent the diversity that characterizes changes in the student populations in higher education, so do our faculty represent dramatic shifts. There are chasms between many senior full-time faculty and freshmen, between full-time faculty and part-time faculty. When we bring full and part-timers together sharing the same students in academic communities, there is the possibility for curricular, pedagogical, and social changes in the college.

The dynamics of teaching freshmen are changing. Faculty are sitting in on each other's classes, reading each other's textbooks, trying out assignments in common. There is no blueprint for these activities. **We respect each other's boundaries in the classrooms, but out of such respect comes the willing to collaborate and to question.**

The changes that are taking place are **"domain-specific,"** as Lee Schulman would put it. His work on portfolios for teacher evaluation is relevant here, as faculty are spontaneously keeping track of their progress and changes in the classroom.

Fred Purnell, former Chair of Philosophy, and now the Associate Provost, has been teaching in the program for three years. His "development" is perhaps emblematic. In the second year of the program, a noted instructor in philosophy taught Philosophy 101. The instructor, a recipient of a QC Presidential teaching award, found at the end of the semester that the experience of teaching freshmen had not been felicitous. Purnell tried his hand the next year, but found that, as he explains, the "learning growth curve" leveled out mid-semester, that the class was quieter than he expected his classes to be, and that he wasn't sure that the students learned very much. He concluded that the mix between philosophy and freshmen might not be beneficial either to students or to faculty.

But he gave it another go, this time trying out another assumption: that "philosophy" might work, if he created an intellectual bridge between the freshmen and the discipline. He chose a new textbook, *How to Think About Weird Thing: Critical Thinking for a New Age*, which introduces philosophical perspectives

in the context of the "paranormal, the supernatural, or the mysterious." Popular culture is filled with claims about the supernatural, faith-healing, outer space, and "science." How to determine which claims are credible? What is rational/ irrational? The course takes freshmen where they enter the university and builds an intellectual bridge to philosophy: this is the achievement of Purnell's course.

Edward Smaldone, Assistant Professor of Music, and a composer, says that teaching freshmen is having important effects on his teaching:

> These students are so familiar with each other that they participate in class as a class and not as a conglomeration of 40 individuals. Their responsiveness has driven a path through my curriculum, so that I find myself changing it, making connections in class which had not previously occurred to me. In short, we are all learning more.

David Weiman, Associate Professor of Economics, was dissatisfied, too, with the ways students were connecting to Economics 101, an Introduction to Macroeconomics. He suggested that Economics 1, and not 101 be included in FYI, and he spent the summer reworking his curriculum, around the "culture of money." His concern, too, is that the discipline, itself, needs to be reconceived within the context of re-examining the function of the liberal arts and the professions.

Our yield in the enterprise are questions: when we put freshmen together in classes, what are the gains and losses? In creating freshmen cohorts, many faculty have found that "high school" behaviors are reinforced: regression toward the mean, whether it be boredom, inattentiveness, chatter, giggling, cliquishness. We find that students join communities in clans, or that they stay within racial, ethnic, or religious enclaves. Queens enrolls students from both the public and parochial schools in Queens: for many parochial school students, college is their first secular experience. In some cultures, silence is the order of the day. In others, students take as the norm talking while others are talking.

In all cases, for those faculty who become engaged, the path driven through the curriculum affects not only the curriculum but also pedagogy.

(We have collected written reports from faculty throughout the project; for a sample of a faculty report, see Thomas Frosch's comments, Appendix, 4.)

Freshman Shock

We have a word for the syndrome that faculty experience when they meet a group of freshmen who have not yet been acculturated, and therefore behave as if they are still in high school: **freshman shock**. The psychoanalyst, D.W. Winnicott is useful here: the transitional object, the teddy bear, the security blanket, he says, is what the child needs to remind him of security he needs to feel grounded. Freshmen take their transitional objects with them into the new culture of the college, in the form of clothing, music, and behavior. We all note the adolescent behavior: affected boredom (it isn't cool to be smart), giggling (faculty often take the giggling personally), whispering. We prefer to see the behavior as representing the liminal state freshmen find themselves in--between cultures.

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For those students who interpret the signs quickly, behavior changes markedly when they face their first college exam, and learn, often dramatically, that expectations in college differ categorically from those in high school

When asked to describe "the most profound difference you've found between high school and college," many students talk about learning how to balance their new found freedom with the responsibilities that come with it. The **expectations**, the freedom, class size, class time, the attitudes, the ways faculty relate to students, taking notes in lectures, exams--all has to be renegotiated. School is no longer school. We've found that if the first semester "takes," students begin to talk about how their perspectives change--and how they are asked to think differently.

1. In college, we're allowed to think more and to express our opinion.

2. The most profound difference is that we analyze more and we are able to be more creative.

3. We are directed, but not restricted.

4. It's more up to the person to do more work. There's more work.

5. In-depth is the word.

6. No one goes around with a marking book, checking to see if you're done the homework. You control your own destiny, and no one is there to stop you from messing up. It's up to you.

7. Not being told how and what to think.

8. New ideas, new ways of thinking, new perspectives

9. College matures your mind. High school indoctrinates it..

One student notes that freedom brings with it a sense of security: college brings with it a loss of the fear of metal detectors, security guards, and crime.

Faculty are learning how to think about such "weird things" as freshmen: about how students enter the various discourses of the academy, how they learn to survive in philosophy, economics, music, anthropology, geology, about how we need to help them make the intellectual connections to the disciplines. As FYIer, Alex Smith suggests, we all need to take a critical view of our unexamined assumptions.

Ideological Clashes

We have also learned about each other, and how differently some of our belief systems and values are *not only about freshmen, but also about teaching and learning, and who has the "right" to an education.* The FYI story is also about skirmishes, about faculty from across the divisions coming into conflict about the ways we see our jobs. Suffice it to say that we realized that "sink or swim" courses--particularly in the sciences--do not give freshmen the best chance of surviving the first year. We concluded that in courses where high drop-out and high-failure rates are **uncritically accepted as the norm** are not sufficient entries into the university.

FYI offers a space where faculty can engage in tough conversations about critical questions, at the very moment that the college is reconsidering the crucial place of teaching and service in review of tenure

and promotion. Out of FYI, we have created an informal forum for good and important talk about what's happening in the classroom, and for significant changes in curriculum and pedagogy.

Teaching Assistants: Another Perspective

I almost forgot to mention one of the most important things I learned from being a TA. It took a while, but I learned to be patient.

Sara Millman

The TAs work hard in the program: They are partners with faculty in the classroom; they mentor, tutor, guide, teach, and counsel, in and out of the classroom. Their roles are demanding, multi-layered, and crucial. Their rewards appear to be immense. They get to see the academy turned upside down, through various perspectives. Most of the TA' work through English 110, attend a weekly seminar, learn about teaching writing through their own writing, and gain important insights into their literary studies through the teaching of composition. All TA's write hefty seminar papers, which are also collected as part of the archives of the project. (A summary of the TA's papers from Fall 1995 are provided in Appendix, 5.)

TAs say things that faculty cannot-- because they are still on the student's side of the desk. They're still attending classes, writing papers, taking exams, facing daily struggles to get through. Faculty often find that because they have a TA, they are better able to identify with their students and to cross the boundaries of age and experience. Through the experienced eyes of their TA's, faculty revisit what it means to be a freshman.

For the TA's, FYI becomes a community for them, as well. In the words of former TA, Samantha Kinsley:

> TAs are a limb on the tree, the family tree, of FYI. In cooperation with the professor, the TA branches out and helps create a sense of togetherness among the class; a sense of community: because you see - in FYI - there are no strangers. The TA takes from what she has learned in her own college classes and uses this knowledge in working with freshmen.
> Using one's knowledge to help teach others is an important way of making connections with students. It brings to the surface the very idea of learning and how the key to unlocking the unknown is through education. In 1940, Sigmund Freud quoted Goethe's Faust in saying, "What thou hast inherited from thy fathers, acquire it to make it thine." This is why in FYI, students return semester after semester to remain a part of the community they found when they joined the program. FYI alums become TAs in the program: they take what they have inherited from the program and make it their own. FYI is not just for freshmen: it's for alums, TAs, faculty, and administrators.

Changing the Institution: Integrating Freshman Services

Data on the Freshman Class

Queens College President Allen Lee Sessoms released this announcement to the CUNY Board of Trustees on March 1, 1996:

> Since its inception in 1992, the Freshman Year Initiative (FYI) has created cohorts of newly enrolled students to ease their academic and social transition from high school to college. Students start the college journey together by enrolling in a block of two or three courses with approximately 40 other newcomers. Small class size and a dedicated faculty help students master their course materials, develop solid academic skills, and build friendships. Students and faculty together explore new ways to teach freshmen, cut across disciplinary boundaries and chart new ways to make learning collaborative process.
>
> The results of the program are impressive. Freshmen retention rates and grade point averages have significantly improved. Participating faculty have become agents of change at the institution level as they experiment with new teaching methods and technologies. FYI has built a community of scholar/ researchers who are making changes where they count most: in the classroom. As a result of FYI, Queens College, its students, and faculty will be better prepared to met the challenges of the 21st century.

The College sees FYI as initiating the beginning of long-overdue studies on retention, transfer students, graduation rates, etc. The image we have often used to describe the effects of FYI on the institution is "that we have opened Pandora's Box." **Another way to represent what has happened is this: there are shifts of perspective in this project. For faculty working together in the common enterprise of teaching freshmen, we see the institution through fresh eyes, and realize how the administrative--as well as the academic--infrastructure needs to be shored up. We have concluded that the job of evaluation of freshman progress is an institutional responsibility: significantly, the college agrees.**

The original evaluation plan derived from our goal of creating *a sense of community* for freshman at a commuter college. Dr. Martin Finkelstein, of the New Jersey Institute for Collegiate Teaching and Learning, devised a survey on student and faculty perceptions about a "sense of community." Meg McAuliffe, Director of Institutional Research, has been our chief inside evaluator. She has collected data on FYI students' rates of retention and grade point averages. Our most complete data are for the class of 1993: we find of 135 students, 72% of that group is still enrolled at Queens College, compared to a 61% six semester retention rate for all entering first-time full time freshmen. We are looking closely at "predictors," at high school grade point averages, types of courses taken in high school, etc. We also plan

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to do follow up studies on students who have left college or transferred. We're going to find out, if we can, why they've dropped out or transferred.

At the end of four years, we have come to the following conclusions:

1) Two years of surveys about a sense of community are not particularly useful. (In the FIPSE Continuation Reports, we submitted copies of the questionnaires and our findings, which generally tell us that students **do** have a better sense of community. We have decided, however, **not** to analyze the third year's surveys, because we are dissatisfied with the instrument, and are in the process of devising new, discipline-based surveys this semester. Surveys will be distributed in December 1996, to all FYI students and their faculty.)

2) We need to study retention and college GPA's, within the context of college-wide data about the freshman class. Perhaps the most significant institutional change has been the creation of the Provost's Steering Committee on Freshmen, with representatives from faculty, administration, and staff. Out of the new Steering Committee, subcommittees on Retention and Testing have been formed, to gather data that the college has decided it needs to understand its current population. We will be pleased to send to you results of our findings, in the future.

3) The institution has come to realize that the support services of the college need to be integrated, so that new students do not get caught in the quagmire of offices working at cross-purposes. The Steering Committee brings together all programs and support services working with freshmen--from admissions to career counseling.

4) The Subcommittee on "Students' Literacies," along with the new CESL/FYI research on linguistic and cultural diversity in new students, proposes to study students' linguistic development through two years, by attending, in particular, to the development of fluencies in writing. We are interested here in doing ethnographic work on student learning in particular disciplines. We plan to do longitudinal work, cutting back across to the high schools and into the majors. Again, results will be sent to FIPSE.

5) Several faculty have undertaken studies of how freshmen are performing in their classes, in anthropology, economics, and political science. They have measured the FYIers against the nonFYIers in their introductory classes. Patricia Bridges, a biological anthropologist, teaching an introduction to her field of study, found last year the FYIers did better in Anthro 102 than the nonFYIers, on their quizzes, exams, and for the final grades. She correlates their performance with better attendance and with the freshmen forming study groups outside class. She is replicating her study this semester.

David Weiman has found the same pattern in Economics. He notes in his plans (November 1996)for a formal study (See Appendix, 6), that FYI students "attended office hours regularly, and turned in their assignments punctually. Several scored the highest grades on the examination." Why did the group perform better? Weiman intends to try to account for what may be a "selection bias," by analyzing their high school backgrounds, trying to cull all the data he can gather for a full analysis.

Kevin Birth's experimental Anthropology 101 puts together students from three different English courses, CESL, English 95 and English 110, to see how they fare in the same course, so that we can better understand linguistic and cultural diversity. His work with Sue Goldhaber in the CESL courses, and with Yu Ren Dong, the Research Coordinator for the new CESL/FYI project, funded by FIPSE, will be reported on in the spring. (A report of his early findings on CESL students' performance in his course have been sent to our program officer, David Johnson, November 1996.)

Our mutual work is giving rise to faculty wanting to know more, not only about linguistic and cultural diversity, but also about the kinds of "literacies" that students bring to the university. What are their ways of knowing? How does immersion in the global world brought to them every day in the media affect their sense of who they are, and of what they see college as for? "It is the end of the millennium," they say, "and who knows if there even will be a world?" (How different this sense than that of the generation who faced, for the first time, the possibility of nuclear destruction? *Holocausts*, in Eastern Europe are the Viet Nams they are brought up in. How do they negotiate the terrors that they witness on the 11 o'clock news each night? (Perhaps, one is given a clue here to the popularity of Stephen King.) In a university where diversity is the mainstay, how do we intellectually account for various cultural perspectives? What kinds of beliefs, values, expectations about education do our students bring to the university?

Why should this generation of students be different from others? Perhaps that is the question? Out of this common enterprise of teaching freshmen, the faculty are asking questions about individual students, about the generation, about performance in the disciplines, about interdisciplinary connections, and in college, as a whole.

G. Summary and Conclusions

> ***The Freshman Year Initiative (FYI) appears to be an excellent model for Queens to use in engaging new students in academic life; it has demonstrated success and significantly involves faculty in advising and facilitating the students progress. Consideration should be given to institutionalizing FYI.***
>
> ***Evaluation Team representing the Commission on Higher Education of the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools, October 1995.***

The original objective had been to create an academic community for freshmen at a commuter college, and thereby to begin focusing on the problem of retention.

With expansion, we began to realize the scope, complexity, and multidimensionality of the problems all freshmen face when they enter the university. Crucial issues about the institution must be addressed:

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1. To focus on the teaching of freshmen is **to open the door to the workings of the entire system,** to what comes before in the high schools, to the freshman year itself, to undergraduate education, to support services, and to the cultural life of the college. To begin by considering freshmen is to end by talking about the institution.

2. The **Provost's Steering Committee on Freshman**, in attempting to integrate both academic and support services which affect all freshmen, is one of the most significant outcomes of the Freshman Year Initiative. The committee recognizes the responsibility of the institution to its new students. Their plans to collect data on retention, graduation rates, transfer students, high school records, etc., will eventually give us the kinds of quantitative data we need to understand what is working (and what isn't) in FYI--and in the college. In addition, the program leads us to questions about this generation of students that need to be answered through collection of qualitative data.

3. FYI creates the possibility for **a freshman "class"** at the college, and the possibility, through academic communities, of a **coherent first year.** FYI students find their identity in college through FYI. They circle back into the program as teaching assistants and want to stay connected to the growing FYI community.

4. **Full and part-time faculty engaged in the common enterprise of teaching freshmen become agents of change**, in the classroom, in the disciplines, and in the college itself. Through reflective practice, faculty are driving paths through their curricula and through pedagogy. They are looking critically at their own unexamined assumptions.

5. The structure of the academic community is **elegant and simple**, says Patricia Bridges, Chair of Anthropology. In the classroom and in the communities is where the important work takes place--the function of the FYI office is to facilitate the workings of the individual communities.

6. The program gains its strength from its **grassrootedness--**faculty working together in teaching freshmen, observing, experimenting, talking to each other, comparing notes, making changes, and including the administration in their **conversations**. The administration, in turn, has created a crucial protected space in which faculty can do their work. The key throughout is **mutual respect** among all participants: students, faculty, staff, administrators.

6. Changes, we believe, will also come out of funneling crucial questions about curriculum and pedagogy through the **various intellectual perspectives** that constitute the academy: we stand to gain when biologists, anthropologists, philosophers, literary critics, and the like work together **under the new category of teaching freshmen**. The following final illustration represents one such venture, from the perspective of a literary scholar:

Coda: *Invitation and Exclusion*

There is no one door to the land of the all inclusive.

FYIer, Will Mack

You see, in FYI, there are no strangers.

Sam Kinsley

In a compelling essay on the poems of Sylvia Plath and Emily Dickinson, the American poet, Louise Gluck, says this: **"The poems from which I feel excluded are not poems from which I can learn."** We have found her idea of invitation and exclusion a useful construct for considering what happens to freshmen in their first year of college. As we watch them adjusting to the various worlds that they enter--philosophy, psychology, history, sociology, geology--we note their struggles with the various discourses of the academy. Each discipline, in a sense, is a different country, with its own discourse, habits, guides, expectations. In some, the guides offer clear maps of expectations, syllabi, scaffolded assignments, dictionaries to key words and concepts, guidelines on how to enter, enjoy the excursion, and gain mastery. The guides are reflective practictioners. They are willing to drive paths through their curricula, to adjust their programs to the new generation of students in their classrooms. Mutual respect is the order of the day. Teachers are learners, too. Experience, often the best teacher. But the scholar/teachers are able to translate their interests and passions to a group of new students.

In others, there are few maps or guides; the "subject matter" is held sacred: students have to find their way in the dark.

In an English course this semester, the instructor decided to construct the syllabus around four writers who were to read their works for the Queens Evening Readings: Seamus Heaney, Arthur Miller, Derek Walcott, and Margaret Atwood. Students were required to attend the readings, and then choose one of the writers, on whom to carry out a freshman research project.

With only three weeks into their first semester in college, students were to attend the reading by Seamus Heaney, the Irish poet, and 1995 recipient of the Nobel Prize for Literature. None of the freshmen had ever attended a poetry reading; none had heard of Heaney; few had any happy experiences reading poetry. To prepare for the reading, the class read half a dozen of Heaney's poems, including two sonnets he had written in memory of his mother. One poem describes a moment between the mother and son, beginning, "While all the others were away at mass," and ending with a remembrance about the closeness of the mother and son in the kitchen, together in the ordinary act of peeling potatoes, and "never closer all the days of our lives." The key here is that the class **got ready** to hear Heaney--reading his words, getting a sense of his life, and the range of his work.

Before the reading, the instructor had the chance to talk to Heaney about the freshmen reading his poetry--and how they were struggling with the sonnet form. He listened and generously offered to change his program to include two of the sonnets the students had read--including the "potato poem."

In the following class, that is how they represented the experience of the poetry reading: It was too high brow, too unfamiliar; there were too many literary illusions, too many in-jokes; too many people, it turned out, were "groupies," following along in their books, as Heaney read. One student said that he fell asleep, until Heaney, at the end of the reading, noted "the new college students in the audience," and read for them two poems, including their potato poem.

Heaney's reading represents the world he travels in--full of Latin and Greek epigrams, Celtic bards, contemporary Russian poets, such as Joseph Brodsky, in whose memory the reading was given; contemporary Irish poets and friends, such as Michael Longley and Derek Mahon. This is, after all, a poet among poets, who keeps company with other recipients of the Nobel Prize. How many of us keep such company or catch every illusion or joke?

How could the freshmen not feel excluded? Until they heard the familiar words of the potato poem, of "our poem," which is how they now refer to the sonnet. Our poem. It is a landing. And when they next heard Miller, Walcott, and Atwood, they were now old hats at attending literary readings. They knew the terrain, the conventions of the landscape. They knew not to worry about what they didn't "get" on first hearing, but took pleasure that there were other ears, including their instructor's, they could rely on. They knew they could ask questions. In fact, one student said that for her, "The best thing about FYI is that you can ask questions about anything and not feel stupid."

As for the Nobel Laureate, we faculty take our lesson from him: if he can drive a path through his program, so can we--particularly as we treat our teaching as seriously as we do our scholarship. The two are implicated. We know the ideal--to be scholar/teachers.

What they have come to, we hope, is what Will Mack says above, ***"There is no one door to the land of the all inclusive."*** Our job, as faculty, is to make certain that the doors are open.

Queens College, Freshman Year Initiative
Appendices

- Information for FIPSE

- 1. Taking a Fresh Look at FYI, Tristan Davies, *Q Magazine*, in press.
- 2. FYI, Fall 1996 Schedule
- 3. Sample Community Structure
- 4. Faculty Report, Thomas Frosch, November 1996
- 5. TA Report, Samantha Kinsley, November 1996
- 6. The Impact of FYI in the Classroom: David Weiman\
- 7. Hesburgh Award Pamphlet Description

Queens College, Freshman Year Initiative
Information for FIPSE

Without FIPSE support for the Freshman Year Initiative, it is unlikely that FYI would have taken hold or survived the upheaval within the university in the past two years. FIPSE support gave the project an independence that allowed us to withstand change, resistance, and even sabotage.

The project has gained from being housed in the national network that FIPSE affords, so that we could see our work in the context of other projects, and benefit from hearing other voices and other conversations. Our perspective has grown most significantly through the most important conversation that FIPSE has provided--that with our Program Officer, David Johnson.

For him, we give thanks--and wish to dedicate this final report.

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Appendix 1

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"final" version

FYI: Taking a Fresh Look at Freshman Life

By Tristan Davies

From Jefferson Hall looking west on the Queens campus, midtown Manhattan appears to form one of the quadrangle's four sides. From this vantage point, you see an entire cityscape, a community on the horizon. Like the wider world that completes this campus quadrangle, the Freshman Year Initiative at Queens adds an extra dimension to the undergraduate experience. FYI, as they call it, has given first-semester freshmen a haven within the whirl of a large, eclectic, and dispersed setting. Of this year's incoming class, nearly two-thirds of those eligible participated in FYI.

The word "family" is a good place to start when talking about FYI. It's a word that Professor Kevin Birth is focusing on during his Introduction to Cultural Anthropology class. Birth's enthusiasm is contagious as he asks his students to write down ten things they associate with "family."

After a few busy moments, the class responds eagerly, and Birth covers the long blackboard with their suggestions. In spite of their varied cultural backgrounds--the students represent twenty nations--they find a certain unity in their idea of family: They cite love, children, money, shelter, among other concepts. As Birth's lecture branches out into the complex family archetypes, the students diligently take notes.

They, too, are part of a family, this one known as Community 7. In the Freshman Year Initiative, there are nine "communities," each with about forty students. From Birth's class, Community 7 students head for English Composition I, the anchor of the three classes that all FYI students take. After lunch, they will spend the afternoon at Professor Allan Ludman's geology class, alluringly titled Earthquakes, Volcanoes, and Moving Continents.

In the classroom and outside of it, these freshmen become part of a cohort; it gives their first semester a cohesive, friendly feel. Already, an FYI mythology has sprung up. There are tales of students rallying around a community member who is ill or distracted by family problems. Rumors of epic group-cramming sessions. An overall aura of collective progress.

"Queens isn't a residential college," says Associate Professor of Economics David Weiman. "The FYI program goes a long way to compensate for all of the support mechanisms that exist at a residential college. The difference between the FYI students and the regular ones can be extraordinary."

The idea for FYI was conceived by Professor of English Judith Summerfield. "The FYI project grew out of a Ford Foundation grant that I received to work on multiculturalism, diversity, and the canon of the traditional English department," says the FYI co-director. "I put together a series of meetings for faculty with the idea of having them talk about these issues in an informal atmosphere. And I found that when we included the students in the discussions, things really got interesting. Finally, I included the administration, and each group got a sense of the other's needs. I was then invited by the Provost to design the most interesting program I could for freshmen."

With an initial grant from the City University and a subsequent three-year award exceeding $200,000 from the Fund for the Improvement of Post Secondary Education (FIPSE), the College launched the program in the fall of 1992 with thirty-two students and five faculty members. "Through trial and error we've come to the existing three-course model, which is 360 students, nine communities, and forty faculty, mostly full-time," Summerfield notes. There is also a two-course model that serves 200 students. Each community shares the goal of providing students with a lively, integrated, and responsive intellectual experience.

The sometimes inventive combinations of classes within a community--Calculus and Music, say, or Archeology and Geology--spring from a individual professor's own designs. "The organization of each community is a byproduct of local history, local culture," says Summerfield.

"That's the key," says Anthropology Chair Patricia Bridges. "These communities are not coming from generic questions about how to teach freshmen. They are much more organic, much more local. For that reason, the program is very elegant and simple."

All incoming freshmen who enroll in English Composition I are eligible for FYI. Participants are given preferential registration for three core classes, and typically will take one or two other classes. In their second semester, the FYI students will be offered preferential registration for courses growing logically from their first semester's

program. Then, at least officially, the FYI community dissolves. However, often the groups live on both socially and intellectually.

Each community's faculty will meet regularly during the semester. However, there is a great deal of informal cross-pollination. "They meet in the mail room," says co-director Martin Braun, Professor of Mathematics. "They talk on the phone." FYI faculty will sit in on the lectures of their colleagues. And when a community's faculty meets, the agenda might be as mundane as ensuring an even distribution of tests and papers or as ambitious as planning a joint program. This term, several communities offered a special program analyzing the presidential election, with each faculty member discussing the election from the perspective of a specific discipline.

Overall, FYI faculty, who represent 22 fields, have found the program to be invigorating. "It's given me much greater insight into what my students are like," says Associate Provost and Professor of Philosophy Frederick Purnell. "I've learned to adjust my teaching style to communicate better."

Bridges has studied the difference between students participating in FYI and those who do not. "Even while I haven't changed the content of my classes for FYI students, I'm changing the way I give assignments, the way I give certain lectures," the Anthropology chair notes. "As a result, I've become more excited. From talking with colleagues teaching other classes, from participating in the program, the class has become more exciting. And when you go into a class excited, the students become excited."

Summerfield's section of English 110 sits in a semicircle while two teaching assistants guide the discussion. The students are coming up with terms to characterize their own generation, and the chalkboard is crowded with words like "hairstyles" and "MTV."

When the class has more or less agreed on its list, Summerfield reads a list of her own. "James Dean," she says. "Elvis, Sputnik. JFK."

She asks her students to compare the two lists. Rhetorically, hers is made of specifics; largely, theirs is composed of broad categories. Hers is more intently historical; theirs is rather pointedly ahistorical.

"But your list is easier," says one student, David Fonseca. "Are you saying it was easier for me at this age than for you?" Summerfield asks.

No, muses Fonseca. He meant that her list benefitted from the perspective of history. Summerfield's point is made.

fyi.fin 3

"We are producing language," Summerfield explains, "a lot of language." At the core of the FYI project is language in all the disciplines. She dispenses the writing assignment and the class ends. Yet the students linger, talking in groups.

"Coming here, I wasn't used to being in a huge classroom," says Olivia Ben-Zur. "It's been helpful being grouped together with the same people."

Sebastian Chavez came to Queens with an interest in film. "I wanted to take Film/ Philosophy/Politics with Professor Royal Brown. Then I heard great things about Andrew Hacker. Supposedly he is a guy who changes people into poly sci majors. So I enrolled in the program, and I got a good English professor, too."

William Mack was sitting alone at freshman orientation when he was converted. "Professor Summerfield sat down next to me," he recalls, and convinced him to become part of FYI. Says Mack, "If you're not going away to college, Queens is the best school. The FYI program makes a big school seem a lot smaller."

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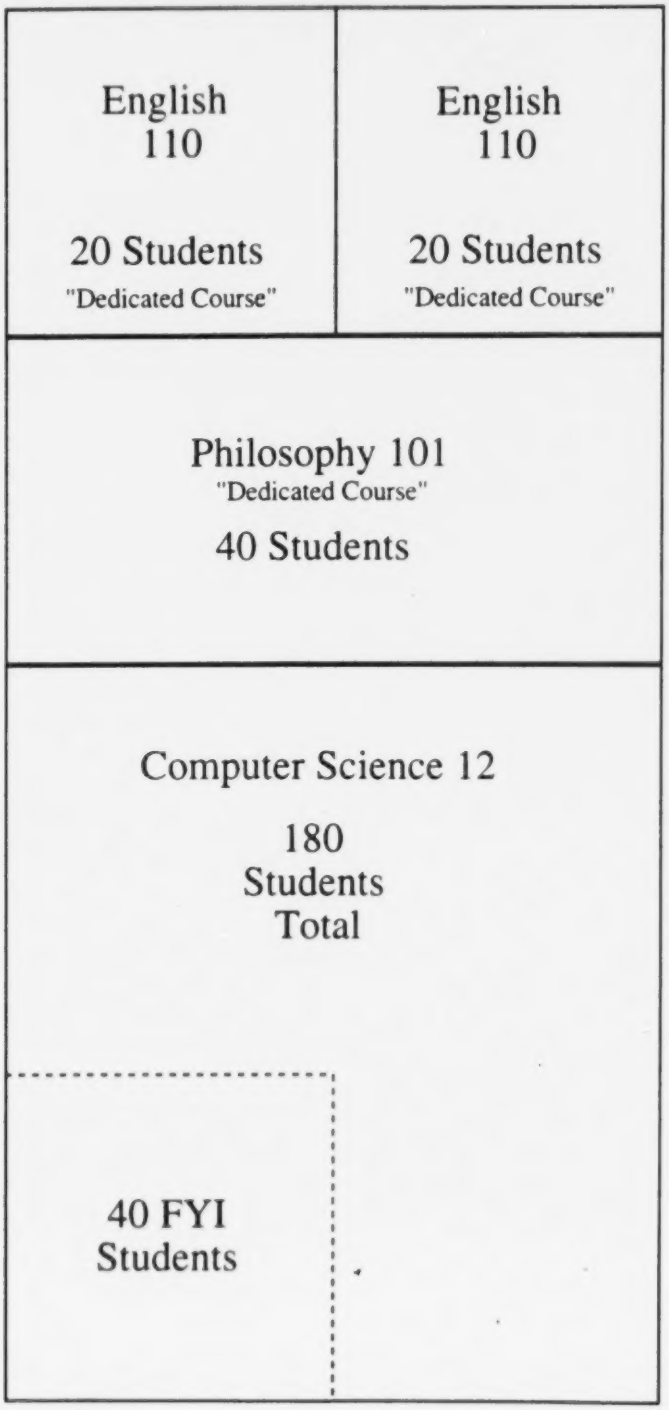
Freshman Year Initiative III 1996

Community	*Courses*	*Description*		*Instructor*	*LASAR*
1	Linguistics 101	Introduction To Language	T, Th 9:30-10:45	Cairnes	Humanities Iii
	CAS 102	Introduction to Media	M, W 9:30-10:45	Haney	Elective
	English 110	English Composition I	M, W 11:00-12:40	Haronian/Seymour	
2	Geology 12	Natural Disasters	M, W 8:00-9:15	Spiedel	Physical & Biologic, Group B
	Anthropology 103	Introduction to Archaeology	T,Th 8:00-9:15	Moore	Social Sciences & PreIndi/West
	English 110	English Composition I	M, W 11:00-12:40	Sargent/Dignon	
3	Anthropolgy 102	Introduction to Human Evolution	T, F 8:00-9:15	Bridges	Physical & Biologic
	Urban Studies 101	Urban Issuses: Poverty and Affluence	W, F 9:30-10:45	Hanlon	Social Sciences
	English 110	English Composition I	M, W 11:00-12:40	Cochran/Dupre	
4	History 104	American History, 1865 to the Present	M, W 9:30-10:45	Wreszin	Social Sciences
	Economics 001	Economics and Society	W, F 8:00-9:15	Weiman	Social Sciences
	English 110	English Composition I	M, W 2:00-3:40	Zimmerman/Whatley	
5	History 102	Modern Europe, 1815 to the Present	W, F 11:00-12:15	Kaplan	Social Sciences
	Music 1	Introduction to Music	M, W 9:30-10:45	Eisman	Humanities II
	English 110	English Composition I	M, W 2:00-3:40	Frosch/Kraus	
6	Philosophy 101	Introduction to Philosophy	T, Th 11:00-12:15	Purnell	Humanities Iii
	Anthropology 102	Introduction to Human Evolution	M, W 8:00-9:15	Stinson	Physical & Biologic, Group B
	English 110	English Composition I	M, W 2:00 -3:40	Moskowitz/Hahn	
7	Political Science 100	American Politics and Government*(20)*	T, Th 9:30-10:45	Hacker	Social Sciences
	Political Science 100	American Politics and Government*(20)*	T, Th 2:00-3:15	Krasner	Social Sciences
	Philosophy 105	Film / Philosophy / Politics	W 2:00-5:00	Brown	Social Sciences
	English 110	English Composition I	T, Th 11:00-12:40	Schotter/Summerfield	
8	Anthropology 101	Introduction to Cultural Anthropology	T, Th 9:30-10:45	Birth	Social Sciences and PreIndi/West
	Geology 16 & 391	Earthquakes, Volcanoes... Lab*(T 3:30-4:20)*	T, Th 2:00-3:15	Ludman	Physical & Biologic, Group B
	English 110	English Composition I	T, Th 11:00-12:40	Fanning/Werner	
9	Math 111	Calculus and Analytic Geometry	M, W 9:30-10:45 Th 10:00 - 10:50	Tischler/Goldberg	Scientific Methodology & Quan
	Music 1	Introduction to Music	T, F 9:30-10:45	Smaldone	Humanities II
	English 110	English Composition I	T, Th 11:00-12:40	Cassvan/Marshall	

Queens College
Freshman Year Initiative
Sample Community Structure in Three-Course Block



The 40 first-year students in a typical community choose 1 or 2 additional courses to complete their schedules.

Judith Summerfield, April, 1995

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Thomas Frosch

FYI Report

In my experience as a teacher of English 110 for three years in FYI, the program has been the source of three types of significant positive change. I've seen it help freshman adjust to college better and perform better; I've seen it bring faculty members from different departments together in new and interesting ways; and it has caused me to modify and, I think, improve my teaching methods in 110.

First and most important, it has improved the lives of freshmen and made success more accessible by giving them a manageable group to which they can belong, making them part of a small, supportive community within a large, impersonal, commuter institution. They're friendlier with each other and seem happier than other freshmen in my experience. They form study groups; when I walk into the room, I find them talking about their assignments in the other FYI classes; in conferences I'm able to talk more readily with them about their entire programs and their adjustment to college in general, not just about their work in my course. This concern with the student's whole college experience comes not only from the community-structure but also from the vision of the program as communicated to the teachers: that we're dealing not just with students but with freshmen and should try to think about what that means. My community has developed a couple of annual events that try to put that vision into practice in a small way: early in the semester we hold a free-hour orientation session, in which, with no teachers present, several veteran students, including at least one FYI alum, discuss any aspects of college and Queens, answer questions, and give the kind of advice they wish they had gotten when they were freshmen; and later when time for second-semester registration comes, we hold the same kind of session, in which the veteran students give uncensored advice about departments, courses, and instructors. FYI, in sum, allows us to give students something of what they would get at a small liberal arts college, and that seems to me a big selling point for us, one that we should advertise more explicitly.

Second, in a college in which it is extremely easy for a teacher never to have anything to do with anybody from a different department, FYI has created a situation in which teachers from the various departments meet formally and informally and, at very minimum, become aware of each other's existence. In my community of changing personnel over three years, there has not been a great deal of interaction; we've had monthly meetings to discuss how classes are going, how students are doing, how various problems might be handled; there's been a small amount of integration of the material of the other courses into the English sections, but there haven't been the kind of joint assignments or elaborate all-community events that some other communities have organized, and, to tell the truth, I haven't been especially interested in fostering them. (We do bring the students together for a free-hour movie, but it's a casual, recreational event, not an academic one.) Still,

I've found it quite enjoyable to get to know the other teachers in my community; it's given me a sense of working together with them on a common project, even if we pretty much go our own ways in doing so. I have also, out of my relationship with the American history course that was part of my community for the first two years, developed a couple of assignments that are now important parts of my 110 syllabus. I've also talked with Marion Kaplan in my community this year about modifying my research paper assignment next year to give it some connections with her European history course. And as far as FYI as a whole goes, I've gained an expanded sense of Queens College from my contact with the FYI people in other departments. I think, apart from any more tangible results, this has given me a better knowledge of and more positive attitude towards the College in general.

Third, dealing with freshmen has forced me to alter some of my teaching methods. In my first semester in the program, which was the first time I can remember ever having a class made up entirely of first-semester freshmen, I was shocked by the immaturity of the students, including their difficulty in paying attention in class and in taking seriously, and remembering, most assignments, or at least all the details of most assignments. Because of this, I did things differently the second time around. I was able to anticipate problems in advance. I gave more detailed and explicit instructions on how to handle assignments. I gave a few sermons on college and study habits in general. I required the use of an assignment notebook. I had them hand in first and second drafts along with the final draft of a paper. I worked on very basic issues like finding the topic of a paragraph of reading. I gave them more assignments in class that required them to focus and listen. I divided the students more often into small groups, and, as much as possible, when I spoke to them as a group about a reading assignment, I did so only after they had written something about the reading or worked on it in small groups and therefore had something to say or at least were sure to have done the reading. In short, I took their immaturity not as an irritant but as a basic condition that I had to work with, not as an obstacle to the real work of the course but as part of that work. (In listening to other teachers, as well, I've found that to be the difference between people who enjoy working with freshmen and those who are frustrated by it.) With that change of attitude, I think teaching the class has been more productive, and it's certainly been more enjoyable. In short, through the program, I've found it interesting and rewarding to work with students not only on very basic issues of reading and writing but also on basic issues of being a student and to try to help them negotiate their way through a critical transition in their academic careers.

I wish I could think of some criticisms of the program or suggestions for its improvement, but at the moment I can't. My one worry about the program is that its interdisciplinary tendency will become standard rather than optional; some teachers even now think that the courses in a community are supposed to integrate each other's material. I believe in interdisciplinary studies, and I'm envious of colleges that offer interdisciplinary seminars to freshmen. But I don't think every course should be

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interdisciplinary, nor do I want to reconceive my course every year to bring it together with the changing courses in my community. Besides, fifteen weeks is just too little time to stuff in all the things I want to do purely in matters of English composition. Additionally, for me, a course is a planned, coherent progression of assignments, and so integrating new things midstream is not something I like to do unless they fit in well with the overall plan.

TA Report [p. 1]

As night takes over the campus of Queens College, the blinking lights of the New York City skyline, to the west, glisten in the early fall evening, while leaves crunch under the feet of teaching assistants from English 398 - Seminar in Teaching English - as they descend from Remsen Hall. The view from here, from the Quad, is like no other: one can see the entire skyline - illuminated - one sees what Henry James described as "the giant pin cushion" in *The American Scene*. Being on the campus of Queens is a unique experience both inside and outside of the classroom.

Today, in the classroom, in the seminar, the students' conversations were engaging and interesting on this Tuesday, with the TAs participating and building thoughts and ideas on the subject of teaching English to college freshmen. The assignment today, for the TAs, was to "define yourselves - define what your tasks are." This was a difficult objective to present to the students because these "tasks" are extensive. The undergraduate and graduate teaching assistants are an integral part of the English 110 class. They are the bridge between the professor and the students. Batsheva (Baz) Dreisinger wrote the following about her role, about her understanding of how she felt working as a teaching assistant, "This was my first semester of teaching, and despite it all -- excuse the cliche -- it was by far, and in all certainty, the best of times. What a truly incredible thing to experience college teaching when I'm only an undergrad, and how wonderful to get a backstage view of what professors are really up to, and how amazing to be a part of a freshmen's very first semester on these hallowed grounds, and how lucky I am to have my career choice confirmed because of

[p. 2]

a marvelous Teacher's Assistant program, and call me Molly Bloom but yes...Yes...YES."

Baz's experiences as a teaching assistant and her feelings were consistent with the other TAs throughout the seminar. The TAs work hard in the program: they attend the 110 class twice a week, help read, comment, and grade homework assignments, essays, and research papers, in addition to assisting the English professor conduct class lectures and discussions. Plus, the TAs attend a weekly seminar conducted by Judith Summerfield. The seminar brings the TAs together and allows them to explore their roles as teaching assistants in the program while also providing them with valuable methods in teaching collge-level English. And even though all of the TAs admitted being anxious and nervous about taking on this endeavor, they all thrived on their experiences. "When I walked into Klapper Hall room 304 on the first day of classes, I was a nervous wreck, and had absolutely no idea what to expect," said Racquel Tuchinsky. But, she added, "Having studied with Ms. Dupre, (her English 110 professor) I knew, that she was a competent and interesting instructor. From the very start, my status and importance was validated as Ms. Dupre officially introduced me as the teaching assistant and wrote my name in big letters directly under hers on the blackboard. She announced that everybody should take advantage of me because I was a valuable source of information and could probably relate to the students better than she could."

[p. 3]

The ability to "relate" to the students is one of the most important tasks the TA will face during the course of the semester. Freshmen are fragile and do not automatically metamorphose into college students just because they've successfully graduated from high school and have started college. Freshmen need time to adjust. They need to be able to test the waters of college - waters that are much deeper and different than the currents of high school. Professors and TAs in FYI work diligently at creating friendly waters for all of the freshmen to travel. "To be an FYI teacher and TA, there has to be a greater awareness," wrote Jennifer Singleton, "Our students deserve it."

Students do deserve the best, the very best, their teachers (and TAs) can offer. Teaching is not an easy job - it's arduous and stressful. "I never knew how difficult a teacher's job was!" said Maria Reyes, when she wrote about her experience, her role, as a teaching assistant. "I took the task very seriously and labored over each student's essay. This was my first experience reading, commenting, and grading papers. It was a time-consuming effort. For me, the difficulty was getting over the initial shock of their first papers." Working as a TA is tough job. It means more than just showing up for class and offering insightful comments. Working as a TA in FYI is not just a job, but an adventure. "I always let the class know that we [she and Professor Schotter] were there as coaches if they needed any help with any aspects of their writing. As a coach, I guided the students. I never told them what to do. I asked them what they should do. If I made a comment about their writing, I went on to explain why I felt that way," wrote

[p. 4]

Sara Millman.

TAs are unique in that they can explain and say things that the professor cannot. The TA can do this because he or she is still on the student's side of the desk. The TA herself is still writing papers for courses, still attending classes, still facing struggles as a college student. And the professors often find that because they have a TA, they are better able to identify with their students - which is difficult when one has been "on the other side of the desk" for a while. The TA doesn't forget what it's like to be a student because she still is one. TAs are a limb on the tree, the family tree, of FYI. In cooperation with the professor, the TA branches out and helps create a sense of togetherness among the class; a sense of community: because you see - in FYI - there are no strangers. The TA takes from what she has learned in her own college classes and uses this knowledge in working with freshmen.

Using one's knowledge to help teach others is an important way of making connections with students. It brings to the surface the very idea of learning and how the key to unlocking the unknown is through education. In 1940, Sigmund Freud quoted Goethe's Faust in saying, "What thou hast inherited from thy fathers, acquire it to make it thine." This is why in FYI, students return semester after semester to remain a part of the community they found when they joined the program. FYI alums become TAs in the program: they take what they have inherited from the program and make it their own. FYI is not just for freshmen: it's for alums, TAs, faculty, administrators.

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Quotable Quotes
Voices From The Past
(TA Report)

"I am so glad that I had the chance to be part of something this great."

"Being a TA will surely help me in my role as a secondary school teacher. I have learned to feel comfortable with talking in front of a class, I have learned how to grade papers, I have learned how to get my students to try their best, and the list goes on and on."

"I almost forgot to mention one of the most important things that I learned from being a TA. It took a while, but I learned to be patient."

Sara Millman

"It has been a delightful experience for me to be your student. I have learned a great deal from you and other teaching assistants whose words and experiences have inspired and enriched my experience as a teaching assistant."

Yu Linda Wang

"When I entered my first class as a teaching assistant for English 110, my hopes and ideas for the forthcoming semester were grand and optimistic."

"A graduate of FYI myself, I am a great supporter of the program. I find that the students are welcomed into the college in an unbelievable way. The students realize the cross over between the various disciplines."

"As I myself walk through the campus I find that there are students who were in my FYI community who I connect to. It provides the student with the networking possibilities of finding out about classes or professors from people who they trust."

"I personally enjoyed acting as a TA this semester. The major drawback, which I mentioned in class, was the haunting sound of my own voice. As I was forced to confront the papers that I had to write for my own classes I hear the sound of my own voices asking annoying questions. I HATED IT!"

Ilana Fodiman

"Aside from my ever evolving role as a teacher, I was able to observe the evolution of the students' writing abilities."

"I would like to congratulate you, Professor Summerfield, on an overwhelming successful program. The weekly seminars were enlightening, thought provoking, and provided a wonderful opportunity for all the TAs to share their experiences. Thank you for the effort you put into our class and the FYI program. It did not go unappreciated by the 110 students either, one of whom told me on the last day of classes that, "It was mostly in this English class that FYI did what it wanted to do - this class worked."

Tzivia Bermish

"From my own observations, intuitive and otherwise, the FYI program makes these young students more comfortable in their new and strange environment."

Maria Reyes

"Closing my eyes, I dream of the voices that called on their mother of writing, thought and conceived by their own creations inspired by the close readings that Professor Cassvan and I encouraged."

Jennifer Singleton

"I began reshaping my ideas about what could be fulfilling for me as a teacher."

"I had always thought that teaching English meant providing brilliant insights into literary pieces, and igniting fierce sparks of creativity in students who would illuminate their writing and ultimately their souls."

"In addition to my dual role as teacher/student, alternatively expressed as participant/observer, I feel that I had several opportunities to be a nurturing figure, and this was a role I had not initially expected, yet eventually embraced."

"All in all, I feel like I've grown up a lot since that first day of class. Working as a teaching assistant has definitely been one of the most enthralling educational experiences of my life. Thank you - for helping to make it all possible."

Racquel Tuchinsky

"I think the program [FYI] is truly (fill in the superlative) for freshmen and others. Reexperiencing freshman year vicariously reminded me just what an adjustment college life calls for, and FYI seems to make this adjustment fluid and easy."

" My students spoke in only the highest terms about the program, telling me how happy they were to get into 110 as freshmen, and how being in a class with the same people was a tremendous comfort to them.

Batsheva (Baz) Dreisinger

"I'm glad I had the opportunity to be part of this program. Besides getting some exposure to what it is like to actually teach, I think that as a teaching assistant, I helped ease the FYI students through a stressful time."

"...the fact that FYI helps them adjust socially is a huge benefit."

Jessie Fischbein

"Twenty years from now our students won't remember what we taught them, but they'll remember how we treated them."

"Our emphasis is on evolution - not design."

"The lone narcissistic researcher."

Kevin Birth

"Choosing FYI is like *NIKE* - Just Do It."

Sam K.

Appendix 6

Version: 25 November 1996

The Impact of FYI in the Classroom: Plan of Study

David F. Weiman
Department of Economics
Queens College

Background

During the fall semester of the 1995-96 academic year, I taught a large section of Introduction to Macroeconomics (Econ. 101). Econ. 101 is the first course in the economics major, required for the accounting major, and partially satisfies students' distribution requirements in the social sciences. Consequently, the vast majority of students enrolled are lower freshmen. Among the incoming freshmen, my course also included a block of students in the Freshmen Year Initiative (FYI) program. Total enrollment for the semester was just under 100, and the FYI students made up 40% of the total.

Over the course of the semester, some (but by no means all) of the FYI students distinguished themselves from the other lower freshmen in the class. They attended class more regularly, and more frequently participated in discussion. They attended office hours regularly, and turned in their assignments punctually. Several scored the highest grades on the examinations.

It thus appeared to me that compared to the other students, the FYI group performed better. One reason, I conjectured, was the collegial atmosphere, fostered by FYI itself. The FYI students clustered into groups, which supported each other during the difficult transition from high school to college. These support groups, I believe, explained their higher attendance rate, and prevented students from "falling through the cracks" in case that they missed a class or two. The groups met regularly to discuss the course material and to work on assignments. Finally, they fostered an esprit, which motivated all involved.

Preliminary Study

After turning in my grades at the end of the semester, I decided to conduct a little experiment. According to my hypothesis, FYI students should have received higher grades as compared to other first-term freshmen. To test this hypothesis, I estimated a simple regression equation, explaining the final course grade. I included as independent variables: lower freshmen, FYI student, and number of absences in the first five weeks of class. I expected the first variable to be negative, because it has been my belief that introductory economics is especially difficult for incoming freshmen. Although they may have the requisite mathematics background, they are not familiar with the very abstract approach to social science characteristic of economics, and so are often confounded by the subject matter. The second variable then tests whether FYI students fared better than other lower freshmen.

Finally, I tried to control for other characteristics. Unfortunately, the only other data available was their attendance record during the mandatory attendance period. Frequent absences, I figured, would be negatively correlated with final grades for one of two reasons. Although students would not miss any substantive material that they could not find in the text, they would not obtain the critical, tacit knowledge of how to handle the demands of college life, both academic and social. Moreover, failure to become socialized into a peer network would decrease the likelihood of success, especially at a commuter college. Additionally, the number of absences simply served as a signal, indicating students' commitment to their studies.

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The results bore out all of my expectations. All other things equal, the final grade of lower freshman was on average 8 percentage points (or almost 20 percent) below that of other students in the class. Moreover, each day of absence during the first five weeks had a similar impact. Participation in the FYI program raised students grade by 12 percentage points (or by more than 25 percent). Finally, the performance of lower freshmen and FYI students were statistically different at conventional levels.

Proposed Revisions

These results are certainly suggestive, but they suffer from a common statistical problem, sample selection bias. Because participation in the FYI program is voluntary, students who take the initiative to find out about and enter the program are likely to be more motivated and hence to perform better in college courses than other incoming freshmen. Consequently, the performance of FYI students compared to other lower freshmen may simply reflect the attitudes and accomplishments, which they bring to Queens, and not the benefits of the program itself.

The attendance variable probably controls at least in part for this selection bias, because as I mentioned above, it does signal the seriousness of the student. Still, with the data available to us, it is possible control for this factor more systematically. By including as independent variables the high school backgrounds of incoming freshmen, we can then ascertain whether the differential performance of FYI students was due (a) to initial conditions (such as their better preparation or greater intellectual facilities) or (b) to the immediate impact of their participation in the FYI program. The relevant data are the number of units and average grades in math, science, and social science courses and whether the student had taken courses in (e.g.) calculus and economics in high school. It is my hope that we can cull and enter data into my database in January and that I can conduct a preliminary analysis before the beginning of the spring semester of this year.

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QUEENS COLLEGE
OF THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

Faculty Development through Freshman Year Initiative

In a climate where fiscal crisis, retrenchment, and calls for increased productivity have become the norm, and student populations have become dramatically diverse, faculty often experience culture shock. In large urban colleges in which both students and faculty are commuters, faculty may find themselves disengaged from their students, each other, and their teaching. Students become casualties — particularly new freshmen who often drop out at the end of the first year. In response to these challenges, Queens College created the Freshman Year Initiative (FYI).

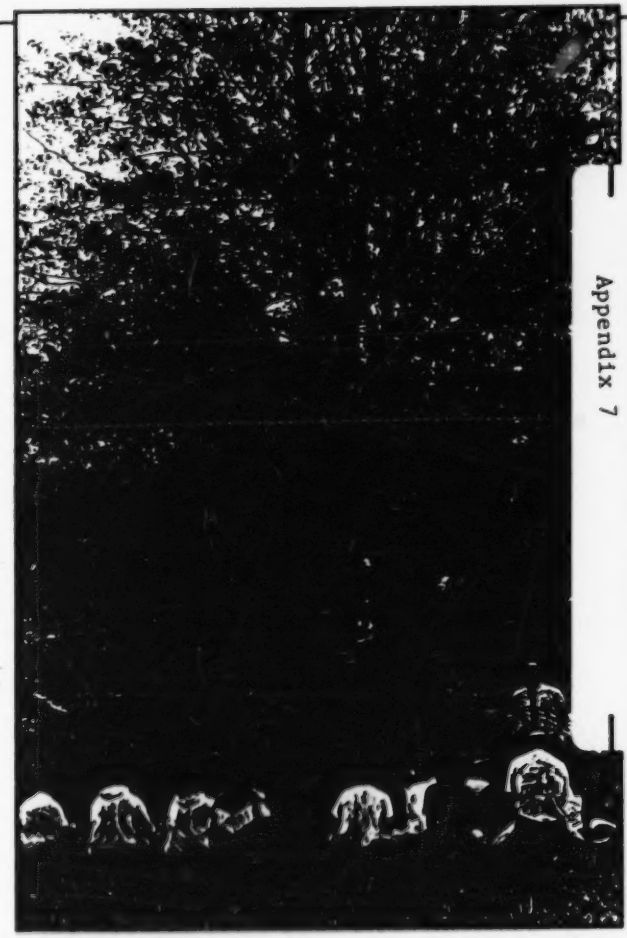
One of the senior colleges of the City University of New York, Queens College, with its 18,000 baccalaureate and master's students, is situated in the most diverse county in the nation. Students arrive at the college from 120 countries and speak 66 languages. To initiate new students into the culture of the university, FYI is built on the concept of the academic community. The administrative structure of the community is a three-course block of 40 students, 4 or 5 faculty, and several upper-class teaching assistants. Now in its fourth year, with funding from CUNY and the Fund for the Improvement of Post-Secondary Education, FYI enrolls nearly 400 freshmen in nine blocks with 40 faculty from 15 disciplines. With the model in place, Queens is ready to enlarge and adapt the program to serve its 1,700 entering freshmen in September 1996.

While the ostensible goal of the project is to increase the freshman retention rate, an equally significant goal is to create a community of faculty to develop the requisite resources to meet the challenges of the 21st century. Engaged in the common goal of teaching freshmen, faculty are teaching themselves, and thereby changing the nature of the institution.

Of the 40 full- and part-time faculty now teaching in FYI, all are scholar/teachers: Some are major figures in their field; others are award-winning teachers. They collaborate across disciplines, rank, experience, age, and gender. FYI faculty meet regularly to exchange course materials and schedules, to chart the progress of their students, and to design new freshman courses. Experimenting with new pedagogies and technologies, they sit in on each other's courses and work together on group projects. Several have even taken acting roles, alongside the freshmen, in a FYI theatrical production.

The enterprise between faculty and students is changing. Faculty have extended the boundaries of the classroom to include the cultural life of New York City. The community esprit has led to a quiet revolution in the classroom. As music professor Edward Smaldone explains: "These students are so familiar with each other that they participate in class *as a class* and not as a conglomeration of 40 individuals. Their responsiveness has driven a path through my curriculum, so that I find myself changing it, making connections in class which had not previously occurred to me. In short, we are all learning more."

What distinguishes FYI is the recognition and respect for faculty as the essential agents of change. Many freshman programs emphasize advising, counseling, and support services, but these do little if the academic foundation is not solid. FYI is predicated on the belief that change must come first out of the academic: what is being taught in the classroom. At Queens College, the Freshman Year Initiative is nothing less than a shoring up of the intellectual foundation of the institution.



FYI faculty and students create community at a commuter college.

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